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HD **World markets 'will not stop' LNG site plans: BC Liberals' Christy Clark; BC Liberal Leader was cheered on Thursday for her commitment to LNG at a cement plant that had increased production to accommodate the site preparation for a string of proposed facilities**

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KITIMAT, B.C. --

For a time, the promise of liquefied natural gas riches was real in B.C.'s northwest.

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Ellis Ross, the Liberal candidate for Skeena, is the former chief councillor of the Haisla Nation, which has embraced LNG as a means to end entrenched poverty.

He noted that when he became the elected leader of his community, it had 60 per cent unemployment. With several LNG projects proposed in their traditional territories, the Haisla saw a significant boom in job opportunities.

"There was billions of dollars that came in," he said. "For four or five years, there was a lot of work. Our people didn't need welfare. They were buying houses and trucks. It transformed lives," he said.

"It got rid of our alcohol abuse problem."

Now, however, that work has all but disappeared, and members of his community are leaving home to find jobs.

Mr. Ross noted the initial boom in LNG site preparation was followed by a bust as a natural gas glut delayed projects and the work trickled to very little. But he sees the BC Liberals' Christy Clark as the champion of the industry, the one political leader in the election who can secure the industry and bring his community lasting prosperity.

The BC Liberal Leader was cheered on Thursday for her commitment to LNG at a cement plant that had increased production to accommodate the site preparation for a string of proposed facilities. Ms. Clark campaigned in 2013 on the promise to retire B.C.'s debt, financed by three new LNG plants that would be in production by 2020.

On Thursday, she said she now hopes to see three plants in construction by then.

"The global market is slow, but that will not stop us," she said.

Ms. Clark visited two NDP-held ridings on Thursday to highlight how the tentative steps from the 19 proposed LNG plants have already helped the economy.

In Kitimat, Ms. Clark spoke on the gravel lot of Kentron Construction, where workers and supporters assembled beneath a red banner that declared "We want LNG."

The company grew to 40 staff providing asphalt and cement for the preliminary site work for Royal Dutch Shell PLC's LNG Canada project in Kitimat. But Shell has put its final investment decision on hold.

It also cancelled its Prince Rupert LNG project on Ridley Island near Prince Rupert, and Pacific NorthWest LNG near Prince Rupert has also delayed its final investment decision after spending $20-million on preliminary work.

Industry experts have cautioned that with low prices for the fuel in Asia and a global glut, proponents in B.C. face years of losing money. The shaky economics have cast doubt on whether any of the 19 LNG projects pitched and still active in B.C. will be built.

However, Ms. Clark was bullish, saying B.C. will be ready when the markets turn more favourable.

The workers at the cement plant have, like the Haisla, watched the LNG jobs fade away. But the Liberal Leader told them LNG remains a viable prospect that has already delivered jobs to this region.

While Ms. Clark starts the 2017 campaign doubling down on her promise of a massive development of fossil fuels, her predecessor broke his silence on her dismantling of his climate action plan.

Gordon Campbell, who led the BC Liberals for 17 years and won three terms as premier before handing the reins to Ms. Clark in 2011, told the Los Angeles Times he regrets not locking British Columbia into a rising carbon tax that would have kept it on the map as an international climate leader.

Mr. Campbell did not directly criticize his successor's LNG ambitions, but indicated he was concerned about the greenhouse gas emissions that would be generated if LNG moves ahead.

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“We started it with some good, strong policies that I would have liked to see carry on,” he told the L.A. Times in a story published on Thursday. He said he opposes carbon tax exemptions for LNG, adding that the Clark government has not done much to advance his climate agenda.

When Mr. Campbell introduced British Columbia’s carbon tax in 2008, it was designed to increase slowly to push down GHG emissions over time.

Ms. Clark has taken a different path, pursuing an LNG industry and approving the expansion of the Kinder Morgan oil pipeline. As well in her 2017 election platform, she has committed to freezing the carbon tax until 2021 so the rest of Canada can catch up under the federal climate action plan. Emissions are rising.

Asked about Mr. Campbell’s remarks, the Liberal Leader said LNG will contribute to climate action if it displaces dirtier fuels. And she added that a California newspaper has no place criticizing B.C.

“You know, I love California and I know that people there are concerned about the environment, but there isn’t a single Californian that is paying a $30-tonne carbon tax,” she said when asked about the story during a campaign stop.

“Armchair quarterbacks will offer all kinds of criticism, but I would challenge them: Catch up to us.”

She said B.C. has benefited from her decision to freeze the carbon tax, paving the way for an LNG industry that could offset forms of energy that produce more greenhouse gases.

“Just one LNG plant could reduce climate emissions by 60 megatonnes,” she said.

With a report from Brent Jang

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